



Implementing multiliteracies-oriented curricula in introductory language programs: Language program directors share their insights on the process

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Abstract

The 2007 MLA challenged Language, Literature, and Culture (LLC) departments to create a more integrated curriculum combining language, literature, and culture. Although the MLA report inspired some reform efforts, it provided little guidance on implementation. To address this, adopting a multiliteracies framework was proposed as a way to incorporate textual content into language courses. Over a decade later, this study explored how U.S. Language Program Directors (LPDs) who implemented such a curriculum navigated challenges and why the uptake of the MLA's recommendations has been slow. The study revealed that while LPDs continued to use existing textbooks, they supplemented them with additional materials and assessments to support multiliteracies-based instruction. However, LPDs faced significant challenges, including increased workload and limited support from colleagues.

Keywords: Textbooks, Language Program Director, Multiliteracies, Multiliteracies framework

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Introduction

Although published over fifteen years ago, the ripple effects of the 2007 MLA report on LLC programs are still strong. A testament to this are the 132nd MLA Annual Convention (2017) as well as the second issue of the 2018 ADFL Bulletin which both dedicated an important part of their presented and published papers to the assessment of the report's impact (e.g., Bernhardt, 2018; Bono & Terretos, 2018; Ghaffarian, 2018; Greenberg et. al, 2018; Lomika & Lord, 2018; Long & MacDonald, 2018; Warner, 2018; Ruggiero, 2018). Written in the midst of a FL crisis marked by declining collegiate enrollments across all levels but especially in the advanced one (e.g., Allen & Paesani, 2010; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; Looney & Lusin, 2019) and resulting from a series of publications concerning the two-tiered system in collegiate language education (e.g., Byrnes, 2001; Frantzen, 2002; Paesani, 2004; Schultz, 2002; Swaffar, 1998), the 2007 MLA Report called on LLC departments to adjust to new expected ways of thinking, learning, and experiencing language education in a globalized world (Kramsch, 2014) while “urging higher education language departments to reconsider their purpose, their mission, and their methods” (Lomika & Lord, 2018, p. 116). It called on the need to move beyond the teaching of vocabulary lists and verb conjugations in isolation and the four skills as separate linguistic and cognitive processes from a functional perspective. The report argued in favor of the elimination of the traditional “two-tiered language-literature structure” in FL programs in favor of “a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole” (MLA

Report, 2007, p. 3). It also emphasized the need to situate language study in social, historical and cultural contexts through a reformed curriculum enabling students to develop “translingual and transcultural competence,” or “the ability to operate between languages” (MLA Report, 2007, pp. 3-4).

Numerous responses were published in the wake of the report and largely focused on its incomplete nature as it failed to recommend pedagogical frameworks and explicit learning goals (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Levine, Melin, Crane, Chavez, & Lovik, 2008; Pfeiffer, 2008; Schechtman & Koser, 2008). Several scholars (e.g., Allen and Paesani 2010; Paesani, Allen & Dupuy, 2016; Kumagai, López-Sánchez, & Wu, 2014) suggested that a multiliteracies approach might best facilitate the implementation of integrated, text-based curricula, which could be essential to reversing the downward trend enrollments reported over the years by the MLA (Looney & Lusin, 2019; MLA, 2007) especially beyond the introductory sequence, and thus essential to saving language programs (Rossomondo & Lord, 2023).

Seeking to understand what it takes to enact such a curriculum in the introductory language course sequence and explain why the uptake has been slow, this study was guided by the following two research questions: (1) How do Language Program Directors (LPDs) report working with existing textbooks to support multiliteracies-based classroom instruction? (2) What challenges do LPDs report facing when implementing a new multiliteracies-based curriculum? To answer these questions, five current and two former LPDs in US collegiate LLC departments, who have recently implemented curricular change in order to align their programs with the MLA Report’s (2007) recommendations, agreed to share their insights.

Literature Review

One important point raised in the 2007 MLA Report is the need for collaboration between “language specialists” and “literature faculty” (p. 236) to ensure the successful implementation of the broad scale reform it proposed. Indeed, the report recommended that tenure-line faculty, who are primarily literature professors in LLC departments, have “a hand in teaching language courses and in shaping and overseeing the content and teaching approaches used throughout the curriculum, from the first year forward.” (p. 241). Scholars raised several issues linked to this statement which fall into two main categories: 1) the report’s impact in the field and 2) the longstanding disciplinary tensions between language and literature scholars in LLC departments.

Impact of the MLA Report 2007 on different stakeholders

Rifkin (2012) examined the applications of the report’s recommendations made in FL programs and found that, a year after the publication of the report, half of the 37 programs he surveyed seemed to have “taken no steps to engage in the discussion of this report.” (p. 73). The other half had, in majority, either seen the language program director distribute a copy of the report to colleagues but had not heard of any plan to discuss the report at any general faculty meeting, or had a discussion at a faculty meeting, in some instances following the request from a dean whose research area was outside the language disciplines. Only a small minority (11%) had actually begun serious reflection on the report and its recommendations as reflected in faculty meetings and discussions, both formal and informal (Rifkin, 2012). Five years after Rifkin’s study, Lomicka and Lord (2018) showed a slight improvement as shown by their survey data. While 57% (n=134) of respondents reported that they had read the report, only 49.6% indicated that they felt “very familiar” with its recommendations (Lomicka & Lord, 2018, p. 118). The authors also reported

that 45.1% of the faculty members who participated in the study indicated that they had not attempted to modify their unit's curriculum as a result of the report while 39.1% indicated an attempt to bring about curricular reform. Included among the challenges that broad curricular reform presents was the lack of consensus among faculty members. This lack of consensus might be best explained by what one of Lomicka and Lord's survey participants confessed: "I try my best to advocate for meaningful curricular changes and revisions [but] my guess is that 90% of my colleagues in the department have never read, much less heard of, the 2007 MLA report" thus indicating that the MLA report had yet to directly reach all departmental faculty (Lomicka & Lord, 2018, p.118). Further, Lomicka and Lord (2018) surmised that faculty investment in the "status quo" can translate into difficulties to implement curricular changes (p. 118).

Disciplinary tensions between language and literature scholars in LLC departments

Bernhardt (2018) underscored that by suggesting that literature faculty should participate in the discussions regarding the first-year curriculum and failing to recommend the converse by having language specialists be involved in the design of the upper-division curriculum, the discourse of the MLA report inadvertently emphasized the status quo and the existence of the two-tiered system (p. 108). Further, Bernhardt (2018) highlighted the lack of knowledge of literature faculty about research in second language acquisition, sociocultural theory, and first- and second-language literacy development and its pedagogical implications (p. 108). Such a knowledge-base is fundamental in a context where research-informed actions are crucial for curricular reform to take place.

One outcome of this knowledge-based divide amongst faculty members often results in disciplinary tensions as explained by Dunbar and Rider (2018), who argued that the "disciplinary barriers so endemic to foreign language departments" (p. 9) are cause for exacerbated malaise with faculty turf issues, jealousy, and mistrust, thus leading to "passive and occasionally active resistance to growth and even innovation in other language areas." (p. 9). To explore this issue further, Zannirato (2015) analyzed the relationship between literary studies faculty and second language studies faculty in 100 U.S. private and public universities by surveying 172 faculty members (91 in literary studies and 81 in second language studies). She found that the vast majority of participants claimed to be working in moderately to heavily two-tiered departments (p. 163). Based on the results of this survey, Zannirato concluded that while the MLA report makes collaboration "a key step in creating an integrated departmental administrative structure in which all members contribute to defining and carrying out a shared educational mission" (p. 291), it cannot be achieved if "the structural causes of disparities between the two groups in question" (p. 168) are not addressed.

As underscored by Lomicka and Lord (2018): "the development of a unified language-and-content curriculum across the four-year college or university sequence", as recommended by the 2007 MLA report, cannot take place in a divided house (p. 119).

The multiliteracies framework and its feasibility

Aware of the language-literature bifurcation commonly found in language and literature departments, the 2007 MLA report called for a replacement of "the two-tiered language-literature structure with a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole, [...] will reinvigorate language departments as valuable academic units central to the humanities and to the missions of institutions of higher learning." (p. 3). However, the report provided no guidance on how to achieve this goal.

Several scholars, many of them pre-dating the 2007 MLA report, (e.g., Allen & Paesani, 2010; Byrnes, 2002; Kern, 2000; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; Scott & Tucker, 2011; Swaffar & Arens, 2005) suggested the multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996) as a potential pathway to move beyond the language-content bifurcation that has characterized the undergraduate curriculum for decades. Kern

(2003) underscored that the concept of literacy

“offers a way to narrow the long-standing pedagogical gap that has traditionally divided what we do at the early levels of language teaching and what we do at the advanced levels. That is, it offers a way to reconcile the teaching of ‘communication’ with the teaching of ‘textual analysis.’” (p. 43).

The multiliteracies approach “envelop[s] communication in the textual” (Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2015, p. 9) and thus has the potential to unify the 4-year curricular sequence. As explained in Kumagai, Lopez-Sanchez and Wu (2015), such an approach has been articulated in a variety of ways in the literature but all rely on the same critical set of notions and assumptions, namely,

“ (1) a view of language as a socioculturally situated semiotic system (Halliday, 1978), and of language learning as a process of gaining access to meaning-making resources; (2) a curriculum that is “text”-based including written and multimodal texts; and (3) a pedagogy that emphasizes “what texts do and how texts mean rather than what they [texts] mean ” (Bazerman & Prior, 2004, p. 3)”

While multiliteracies-oriented pedagogy in the language classroom is clearly advocated by many scholars, questions remain about its feasibility (Allen & Paesani, 2008) when the textbook and other materials that go with it still hold a prominent role in language programs, especially those with Graduate Student Teachers (GSTs) and adjunct instructors, and might not facilitate its instantiation. In her study of four widely used introductory French collegiate textbooks, Hashemi (in preparation) found that the lack of authentic texts, the narrow range of text types and discourses as well as the narrow range of activities built around these texts and their orientation make it very difficult to merely rely on the textbook in order to achieve the goals of a multiliteracies-oriented pedagogy. Supplementing and subverting the textbook then becomes crucial. Several examples of such strategies appear in the literature and are examined in the next section.

Textbook use in multiliteracies-oriented foreign language curriculum

Using a literacy-oriented framework, Fabbian and Zanotti (2018) describe the practices and strategies they adopted to develop the 5th and 6th semester curriculum in the Italian undergraduate sequence at the University of Illinois. The authors implemented key elements of social justice education along with a literacy-based approach in order to promote learners’ pro-social identities and social mobility. They maintained the use of a textbook arguing that it can be helpful especially when instructors and students confront and discuss its biases and limitations but supplemented it with texts as a way to balance the textbook’s interpretation on certain cultural aspects. Samaniego and Warner (2016) also used a textbook as a starting point in the design of a multiliteracies-based lesson for a S

panish heritage language course. Similarly to Fabbian and Zanotti (2018), they argue that the textbook “can itself be the object of analysis and critical reflection as a cultural artifact with underlying assumptions, value, and relevance” (p. 205).

In other examples, the textbook was eliminated and replaced with different resources. This was the case in a basic-level German class focusing on promoting students’ translingual and transcultural competence, one of the recommendations stated in the MLA report. In this case, Ducate and Stechenbiller (2017) assessed how, in the beginning-level German curriculum of a large south-eastern university in the U.S., close readings of authentic cultural texts, careful discussion and a final analysis of the introduced topic could foster critical thinking skills and lead to a deeper understanding of the intricacies involved in the processes of the cultures of German-speaking countries and possibly also their own. The textbook was replaced by wikis and texts selected by the GSTs. Findings from pre-/post-test showed that students increased their cultural knowledge of German-speaking countries, mainly in their knowledge of practices, over the course of one semester. Bono and Bilbao-Terreros (2018) opted for “the abandonment of generic manuals and textbooks in favor of original materials and assignments” (p. 126) in order to have better control over the activities and topics presented in class, provide students with continuity and avoid inauthentic and stereotypical texts.

While the studies previously examined focus on curriculum development at the course level, the German Department at Georgetown University (Developing Multiple Literacies, 2000), Maxim, Höyng, Lancaster, Schaumann and Aue (2013), and Paesani (2017) offer examples of curricular revision in the introductory sequence with literacy as an overarching goal. In each of these programs, the textbook played various roles and its use was either central or peripheral. In Maxim et al. (2013), a committee composed of faculty members was charged with gathering “authentic printed and visual texts that delivered the cultural content and served as vehicles of instruction” (p. 7). These texts formed the core material used in the classroom and the commercial textbook was used only to provide students with the grammar and vocabulary they might need to communicate successfully about the themes selected for each course. Paesani (2017) explained how, in the context of reforming the French curriculum at her institution, it was decided to keep the textbook at the center of instruction for practical reasons since the interaction between many instructors and the LPD were not as frequent as an implementation of “in-house materials” would require due to their out of campus employment (pp. 5–6). A textbook with authentic texts and integrated study of language forms with exploration of cultural content was reviewed and selected by the LPD and departmental instructors. However, it was noted by the author that instructors were trained and taught how to adapt the textbook to be consistent with the program's objectives and the literacy-based approach.

Overall, the aforementioned studies show that a variety of ways have been adopted when developing a multiliteracies-based FL curriculum and that they can include a combination of textbooks and other complementary materials or no textbook at all.

Methodology

Research questions

In a context where (1) textbooks' limitations may constrain the implementation of a multiliteracies-oriented pedagogy thus instantiating the recommendations made by the MLA report may not be straightforward and where (2) departmental structure and disciplinary divisions may stand in the way of curricular reform, answers to the following research questions were sought:

- (1) How do LPDs report working with existing textbooks to support multiliteracies-based classroom instruction?
- (2) What challenges do LPDs report facing when implementing a new multiliteracies-based curriculum?

Participants and Context of the Study

A search in Google Scholar using key terms (multiliteracies; foreign or world language curriculum) and custom range dates (2008–2018) allowed the researcher to identify potential participants on the basis of their publications. Next, only authors who reported on multiliteracies curricular reform in an introductory foreign/world language program were retained. Finally, the researcher established whether these authors were LPDs in these programs by either relying on the information they provided in their manuscript or visiting their departmental web page. Eight potential participants were identified as LPDs in US collegiate LLC departments who reformed the curriculum of the program they oversee in order to implement the recommendations made in the 2007 MLA Report. All eight were contacted via email in Fall 2018 and seven accepted to participate. Five were current LPDs and two (Diana and Phyllis) had recently stepped down from their position (respectively 2 and 1 year prior to this study). They were included in this study since they only had very recently stepped down to take on another administrative position and their insights would therefore still be valuable. Of the seven LPDs, three were in French, two were in Spanish, and two in German. All participants completed each of the steps included in this study, except Molly who did not participate in the follow-up interview. All LPDs but one were working in BA-, MA- and PhD-granting departments, which means that courses in the basic language programs were taught in large part by GSTs.

Table 1. *Research participants¹*

Name	Rank	PhD in	Years as LPD	University
Diana (former LPD)	Professor	Applied linguistics	over 10 years	Western R1 Public
Phyllis (former LPD)	Associate Professor	Linguistics	over 10 years	Midwestern R1 Public
Christine	Associate Professor of Practice	Applied linguistics	over 10 years	Eastern R1 Private (non-profit)
Rachel	Associate Professor	Applied linguistics	over 10 years	Midwest R1 Public
Wendy	Associate Professor	German Studies	5 to 10 years	Western R1 Public
Molly	Assistant Professor	Linguistics	1 to 5 years	Midwest R1 Public
Patricia	Senior Lecturer	Applied linguistics	1 to 5 years	Eastern R1 Private (non-profit)

Research Design

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used and involved collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data. Adopting this design allowed for an investigation based on “multiple ways of seeing and hearing” (Greene, 2007, p. 20) while keeping an “accessible approach to inquiry” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 2) at the same time. Quantitative and qualitative data are intended to complement each other (Phatiki & Paltridge, 2015). Participants’ responses to the questionnaire provided a set of initial findings which were then used to inform the set of guiding questions that would be followed up by more probing questions based on the participants’ responses during the interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected sequentially over a period of six months.

Questionnaire

Participants were sent a link to the questionnaire which included a consent form with key information on the purposes of the study and the expected completion time. Created in Qualtrics, the online questionnaire focused on four main topic areas: background information (10 questions), textbook in use (14 questions), other instructional materials (3 questions), and graduate student teacher (GST) professionalization (6 questions). Only the data of the first three main topic areas are reported and discussed in this article.

Questions asked for factual information and were either multiple-choice or open-ended. Responses to multiple choice questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics and responses to open-ended questions were analyzed through a process of iterative reading and thematic analysis (Glesne, 2016) and the principles of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout to ensure participant anonymity.

Interview Protocol

Upon completion of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to participate in a recorded follow-up interview. Six of the seven respondents agreed to be interviewed. The interviews occurred in the Spring of 2019 and were conducted by the primary investigator. The semi-structured phone interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using Descrip. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022) was conducted and each interview was analyzed to identify, analyze, and report themes within the dataset.

Findings

The study findings are reported in the order in which the research questions are presented above.

Working with existing textbooks to support literacy-based classroom instruction

The first research question sought to find out how the study participants worked with their adopted textbook as they implemented a multiliteracies-oriented curriculum in their program.

Use of textbooks

The LPDs who participated in this study were asked in the questionnaires whether they used a textbook in the programs under their supervision and if they did, how long their textbook had been in use and whether they had selected or inherited it. They were also asked whether they were using their textbook chapters in a sequential way or skipping chapters and why. They were asked whether their textbook came with its own homework platform and ancillaries and whether they used it. Finally, they were asked whether they had made any deletions, adaptations (including subversions), and supplements to their textbook to best meet the multiliteracies orientation of their reformed curriculum, and if so what kinds. The answers to these questions are reported in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. *Textbook use*

Name	Textbook	Years in use	Selected (S) or inherited (I) textbook	Sequential use?	Homework platform and ancillaries
Diana	Pearson	More than 4	S	Yes	Yes
Phyllis	Cengage Learning	Between 1 and 2	S	Yes	Yes
Christine	McGraw-Hill Higher Education	More than 4	I	Yes	Yes
Rachel	Online platform	Less than 1	S	Yes	Yes
Wendy	OER	Less than 1	S	Yes	No
Molly	Prentice Hall	More than 4	I	No	Yes
Patricia	Pearson	More than 4	I	Yes	Yes

All LPDs reported that they were using a textbook in their first-year program ([Table 2](#)). While most of them had adopted a commercial textbook, Wendy and Rachel opted for a less traditional source of material. Indeed, both used a content-based OER textbook with a fully integrated online platform that came with ancillary materials, which was still in development at the time of the study. The distinctive characteristics of Wendy's textbook lie in the fact that it uses systematic and contextualized language, culture and grammar progression. When asked about her motivations to choose such a textbook, Wendy said: "I appreciate the approach and liked the ethics of using something that is OER and not a commercial textbook" (questionnaire

response). Christine discussed that she is aware of the issues with the textbook in place and has been working with members of her department and instructors to move towards a non-commercial textbook similar to the one Wendy uses. However, since no agreement could be reached amongst all stakeholders, the textbook has not been changed (interview). She was nevertheless able to supplement the textbook with a variety of texts at the basic level. Another non-traditional textbook in use was the one used by Rachel. The textbook she used was a textbook organized around the principles of backward design with “formative and summative assessments and e-portfolios that are keyed to clearly delineated learning objectives.” (questionnaire response). This textbook uses text-driven language learning and task-based instruction and is based on a social networking model such as Facebook. Rachel closely participated in the design of this textbook, which is why she uses it in the first-year program. She also uses supplemental texts, especially in the third and fourth semesters of the curriculum. Patricia shared that she was currently piloting a new textbook in one of the basic level classes. She believed that the textbook by the publisher Cengage, and more particularly the online platform it comes with which allows for personalization of the e-text by adding resources, would allow her to make textbook supplementation more systematic. Finally, Diana and Wendy explained their choice of textbook with the purpose of transitioning from a program grounded in communicative language teaching to one with a literacies-orientation and better aligning with the overall goals of the program. They selected their textbook based on its range of authentic texts, integrated language, content, and culture and activities with “real purpose” (questionnaire response).

All LPDs reported using the textbook in a sequential order except for Wendy and Molly. Molly reported: “We skip chapters because there is not enough time in the semester to fit all of the chapters. We choose the chapters to skip based on content, and what aligns most with goals and student interest” (questionnaire response). Both also indicated using an online platform, but Wendy made sure to clarify that the online components in the textbook in use are located on their learning management site Canvas.

Supplementing the textbook

While all the surveyed LPDs reported using a textbook, six out of seven reported that they were also using supplemental texts with the textbook. These texts belonged to a variety of different genres depending on the LPD (narrative, recount, procedure, exposition, explanation, report or digital). Phyllis was the only LPD who did not supplement the textbook with texts and explained: “we had deliberately chosen a textbook that had a lot of materials in it, so instructors were not asked to find their own texts” (interview). Because the instructional staff consisted of five GSTs and six or seven part time instructors teaching at multiple universities, Phyllis stated that it was more important for her to get instructors to use the textbook’s texts to their maximum effect as opposed to asking them to supplement the textbook with additional texts: “The textbook is a tool that we can modify to align with our goals and objectives. I don't know how successful I was at doing that... After we had implemented the curriculum for a bit, we realized that some of the textbook’s texts weren’t working really well so we did some workshops on trying to modify the existing textbook activities to respond to the kind of difficulties occurring in class” (interview).

Data also showed that LPDs who had inherited the textbook in use were the ones who had the greatest variety in the number of supplemental texts used. As put by Diana and other LPDs, supplementing textbooks with texts can be time consuming but since “most textbooks are kind of a mixed bag of previous approaches, you can use some parts of [it] but overall you have to rework the activities” (interview). Diana also shared her concern about the fact that if she did not supplement the textbook with texts, students would be exposed to a very minimal number of authentic texts. The process of selecting supplemental texts was always done in collaboration between the LPD and the GSTs or a course coordinator. Data also showed that when introducing supplemental texts to the classroom, a majority of the surveyed LPDs reported using digital texts while Molly and Wendy preferred to use printed texts.

Staying put with the textbook

Finally, the LPDs were asked whether they had ever considered not using a textbook at all. The results show that while 3 LPDs did indeed consider not using a textbook to mostly escape the constraints of the

textbook and expose students to more authentic texts, 4 responded that they had not considered it. It appears that the support that a textbook provides is something quite difficult to part ways with, especially for GSTs and their students. Patricia explained: “I considered not using a textbook for the introductory level and realized that TAs as well as students tend to rely [on] it as a support and a guide. In addition, the online platform allows to implement a flipped classroom” (questionnaire data). Going in that same direction, Christine shared that “working in larger multi-section departments in the past, I will say it's been helpful to have a textbook program to work with and subvert” (questionnaire data). Finally, Molly clarified that she was reluctant to completely get rid of the textbook because of the “little institutional support for curriculum development, insufficient expertise on curricular writing, and the need for online practice activities” (questionnaire response). These challenges were also mentioned by the other four LPDs who indicated that they had not considered not using a textbook at this level. Diana shared that:

“The task seemed too daunting even with the option of including graduate student instructors in the process. Supplementing was a better option. Developing all the materials would have taken more time than what as an LPD I was expected to devote to the program.” (interview)

The question of GSTs' help in the process of moving away from the textbook was brought up by Phyllis who said that it “would have required a level of professional development that I would not have been able to provide.” (interview). Wendy also mentioned resistance from GSTs and said: “I have tried this in 3rd year courses and the grad students strongly preferred the support of a textbook.” (questionnaire response).

LPDs looking toward the future of textbooks

When inquiring about the kind of recommendations this study's LPDs would like to give textbook publishers, a consensus emerged. The LPDs agreed that research should inform the content and design of activities in instructional materials. For example, Rachel volunteered that textbook publishers should pay more attention and “follow the lead of scholars in the field rather than what has sold before” (questionnaire response). The texts available in the textbooks in use were also criticized by all participants who asked for “more depth, less breadth” (Molly, questionnaire response) with the integration of more texts embedded in the study of language forms in authentic, culturally rich materials that recognize that “postsecondary students are adults with adult interests” (Molly, questionnaire response). Finally, Christine mentioned that the high price of textbooks is an issue and that the “Cengage's "Netflix" subscription model is a great solution” (questionnaire response). Overall, the majority of participants strongly believed that open educational resources are where the profession is going. Diana volunteered: “Open Educational Resources that rely on crowdsourcing is the only way” (questionnaire response) to potentially alleviate the drawbacks of using a textbook.

Challenges encountered when implementing a multiliteracies-based curriculum

Participants were asked about the challenges they encountered while working on the implementation of a multiliteracies-based curriculum. Three main challenges emerged: (1) time/workload; (2) faculty and student buy-in, (3) collaboration on curriculum development.

All LPDs in this study agreed that developing a multiliteracies-oriented curriculum for the basic language program can be rewarding. For example, one LPD indicated enjoying watching “the grad students be skeptical [when teaching with texts] and then recognize that students can do so much more than they expected!” (Wendy, questionnaire response). Other rewards reported by the LPDs included the enjoyment of seeing students interact with a wide range of texts and being “more involved, and motivated to do more work, reading, research, than expected” (Patricia, questionnaire response). Molly mentioned that she enjoyed supplementing the textbook with her own texts as “this is a way of putting our own stamp on our curriculum” (questionnaire response).

However, despite the rewards that come with doing this work, many challenges were reported. All LPDs indicated that curriculum reform is very time consuming, thus adding to a workload that is notoriously

heavy for anyone in this role (Lee, 1987; Schulz, 2005; Katz & Watzinger-Tharp 2005). The teaching load of the LPDs in this study varied and so did the number of levels supervised.

Table 3. *LPD workload*

Name	Teaching load: number of classes taught in academic year	Number of hours conducting LPD tasks per week	Semesters supervised
Diana	1-1	15	1st to 4th
Phyllis	1-1	15	1st to 3rd
Christine	2-2	10	1st to 4th
Rachel	2-1	10+	1st to 5th
Wendy	1-1	10	1st to 5th
Molly	0	20	1st to 5th
Patricia	3-2	10-14	1st to 3rd

As Patricia explained, “adapting the textbook by selecting other texts and creating better aligned activities was a challenge in terms of time” (interview). Also, Phyllis mentioned that “the development of assessments was challenging because the textbook package did not include well integrated exams – everything was thus prepared from scratch and we spent a lot of time adjusting our assessments based on ongoing program evaluation.” (interview).

Buy-in from faculty and students was another challenge that was mentioned several times by different LPDs. Rachel said that “it is challenging to provide enough form- and meaning-focused practice and to create assessments that make students' learning visible and to change instructional practices and change student expectations” (questionnaire response).

Collaboration between the LPD and colleagues was also reported as being a challenge by the LPDs who participated in this study. While collaboration existed between the LPDs and the instructors teaching in the basic language program, it did not with the tenured and tenure line faculty. Phyllis explained:

“I frequently consulted with graduate teaching assistants and part-time faculty teaching in the program to design level objectives, creating assessment plans etc. They provided input on adopting a new textbook. [...] They were sort of providing input on foundational elements of the curriculum that I sort of put into practice” (interview).

In most cases, LPDs reported that because of the bifurcated nature of their department, they had never collaborated with upper-level tenure-line literature faculty. Rachel mentioned that:

“They are not particularly interested in this stuff” and “maybe they're fine with us incorporating content into the language program though they think that what we do is such lower order thinking that it doesn't really matter, but they certainly have shown no inclination to incorporating meaningful focus on form in the literature courses that I teach” (interview).

Similarly, Phyllis volunteered:

“There was very little communication between myself and the other faculty in the program about lower level language courses when I did a large-scale curriculum revision. I shared with them what we were doing and they kind of patted me on the back and said, ‘nice job,’ but we didn't really engage in discussions about how the goals of the basic-language program could articulate with the goals and objectives of the upper level” (interview).

In her department, Diana talked about how the status quo was still pretty much in place at the time she was the LPD and that the only time literature faculty would look at what was being done in the basic language

program was to criticize how assessment was conducted. In most cases, the LPDs were granted a lot of autonomy in their work. In some instances, as Diana explained, the LPD can face the criticism of literature faculty who often don't understand what the LPD's job consists of. As put by Wendy: "I don't think anyone pays that much attention to what I'm doing in the language program unless they feel like it's impacting them in some way" (interview). Christine for example was faced with some skepticism coming from her colleagues:

"I've had to be very very [sic] careful about any changes I made. There are things that I would like to be doing but I don't feel like I have the trust to actually carry out some of the ideas that I want to do" (interview).

Even though Christine had over ten years of experience as an LPD and came from a position where she had implemented and actively worked on literacy-based approaches, she could not say that the curriculum at the basic level was fully literacy-oriented at her current institution:

"It definitely is one of the major features, but because I'm so new, I've really been trying to do more of a listening tour and just kind of help in the beginning and sort of clean up the things that need to be cleaned up and then gradually bring in more text-based work" (interview).

She also added: "We're working a little bit on reading and trying to find more texts for our beginning and intermediate classes, but it's been a little bit more of an ad hoc thing." Patricia, who, just like Christine, is a new hire with a non-tenure-line contract reported that the bifurcation in her department was mostly with the older literature faculty who are "never really interested in what I do. If they did, the language-literature split might be less important" (interview). She also stated that tenured and tenure-line faculty members made sure that she understood that her role was limited to the basic level and thus her opinion was not welcomed at the higher level. She further explained that in order to boost enrollment in upper-level literature classes, faculty members decided to remove Business French and other French for specific purposes classes without ever asking the two hired applied linguists for their opinions about the consequences of making such a choice. Patricia admitted: "In my opinion, the biggest problem beyond the language-literature split is the problem of the University's discourse: modern languages are always seen as secondary" (interview). Consequently, she explained that she was not surprised that her colleagues believe that "these classes don't need to be coordinated by specialists or applied linguists." Wendy's department is also bifurcated although she mentioned that it is mostly a "generational bifurcation" as previously reported by Patricia. In her case, she explained that she did collaborate with a literature colleague in order to get rid of a gateway course at the fifth semester of the language program. Together they changed the curriculum in order to move away from a harsh language-literature split, which made her think that there was potential for change in her department to move away from a bifurcated curriculum (interview).

In addition to their LPD duties which may cover different levels (see [Table 3](#)), the teaching load of the LPDs who participated in this study varied widely.

Discussion and Implications

In 2007, the Modern Language Association (MLA) issued a challenge to U.S. collegiate LLC departments, urging faculty members to "transform their programs and structure . . . [r]eplacing the two-tiered language-literature structure with a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, literature, and culture are taught as a continuous whole."

All seven study's participants answered the call by implementing a multiliteracies-oriented curriculum in the introductory sequence to fulfill the vision of the MLA report. However, as the data show, instructional materials, workload, instructional staff, disciplinary interests, and faculty statuses presented a set of challenges they had to contend with and which might explain why the broad curricular paradigm change called for by the 2007 MLA Report continues to struggle to take hold.

Data show that the textbook still holds a prominent place in the programs supervised by the study's

participants, however, all, except Phyllis, indicated that they intensively supplemented it, proving that the content of most textbooks is not enough to enact multiliteracies-oriented instruction. Blyth and Davis (2007) explain that “the structure of commercial academic publishing actually inhibits innovation and results in materials that are not particularly learner-centered or user-friendly” and underscore that “locally produced digital materials” (p. 182) are one way innovation can be fostered. However, leaving the textbook behind was not an option that the majority of LPDs in this study seriously considered. Workload and instructional staff, whether they are novice GSTs or part time instructors, loomed large in this decision. They felt that the amount of professional learning and time commitment this would require of them and the instructors in their program was a hurdle and that they needed to be mindful of this and find a compromise that works for everyone. Study participants indicated that they would like to see research inform the content and design of activities in textbooks so that they align with current thinking in the field. Such a move would certainly be welcome and would likely support more widespread curriculum reform efforts given the realities wherein LPDs work and ensure the viability of language programs (Rossomondo & Lord, 2023).

Buy-in from and collaboration with tenured and tenure line colleagues, while critical to enact the 2007 MLA report’s vision of a 4-year unified undergraduate curriculum, were to a large part non-existent. Indeed, the 2007 MLA report underscores that curricular transformation can take place only “through sustained collaboration among all members of the teaching corps” (p. 6) and Allen & Paesani (2010) argue that the introductory FL curriculum is where collaboration is most critical if departments want to create an integrated, coherent sequence of courses, focused from the beginning on the long-term development of students’ academic literacy in a FL. Several LPDs discussed the split that exists along disciplinary interests and labor divisions in their bifurcated departments and reported that their colleagues are not overly concerned with the foundational courses unless it directly affects them. As this study’s findings show, participants reported that their colleagues are “not particularly interested in this stuff” (Rachel), “don’t pay much attention” (Wendy), have “very little communication” with them (Phyllis), and when they do communicate, it is often “to criticize how assessment was conducted” (Diana) thus creating an environment where curricular changes are to be made in a “very careful” way (Christine) and need to be “limited to the basic level” (Patricia). Such divisions and their resulting marginalization have been reported and discussed in the literature for almost 50 years (e.g., Brod, 1979; Dvorak, 1986; Harris-Schenz, 1993; Ryan-Scheutz, 2010; Schulz, 2005, Katz & Watzinger-Tharp, 2005; MLA Report, 2007; Zannirato, 2015). They create a set of emotional challenges, adding further stress to the professional and personal lives of LPDs who are often tasked to maintain student interest in their programs as they seek institutional support which is often equated with retention and recruitment. In their study, Warner and Diao (2022) reported on the additional layers of emotional labor that several of their LPD participants experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic as they provided support to the students enrolled in their programs and the instructors who taught in them. Lomicka and Lord (2018) underscore that “the development of a unified language-and-content curriculum across the four-year college or university sequence” (p. 119) as recommended by the 2007 MLA report, cannot take place in a divided house. They further add that “the work we do individually will never be sufficient to initiate widespread reform unless we are able to join with other players to maximize our resources and our efforts (p. 119), a point also made by de Bruin and Spino (2022), who stress that uncertain times call for unity and collaboration, not fragmentation.

The LPDs in this study sought to implement the vision the MLA report outlined almost fifteen years ago by implementing a multiliteracies-oriented approach in the introductory language sequence as a pathway to curricular reform through the integration of textual content. While they reported the rewards that came with such curricular reform, they also shared the challenges that they faced in the process. One of these challenges was the lack of appropriate instructional materials and assessments, which meant that they had to devote additional time, in an already very taxing role, to identify authentic texts which would be both accessible to students and have cultural value, and design appropriate activities and assessments. Another challenge was the lack of interest and collaboration by tenured and tenure line faculty in their departments. Both challenges might explain the slow uptake of the recommendations made by the 2007 MLA report.

As underscored by Rossomondo and Lord (2023), textbooks can serve to support curricular reform but they

cannot do that unless they “apply current second language research into effective, engaging materials for our students and thus provide our students with the greatest chances of success.” (p. 100) and while they offer a vision of how this could happen, it will be incumbent on LPDs to press this with publishers. To enhance communication and knowledge sharing among faculty members, Allen and Paesani (2010) suggest having a shared materials folder and directly soliciting input from tenured and tenure line faculty regarding genres and texts that could be accessible to learners in the introductory sequence. They acknowledge that while not all faculty might want to be involved, some might “given the curricular changes at the introductory level have a potential ripple effect later in students' learning trajectories.” (Allen & Paesani, 2010, p. 133). Having all faculty familiar with the pedagogy, the content, the assessments, and the student learning outcomes of the introductory language sequence is crucial for the sustainability of programs.

Limitations of the study

A number of limitations must be noted. First, it is important to note that our findings need to be interpreted in the context of a study that focuses on a small number of participants and as such, cannot be generalized. Increased opportunities to interact with the study participants would have been beneficial but as this study shows, LPDs have very busy schedules which limited the demands that could be made of their time. It would have allowed us to get to know them on a deeper level and perhaps would have led them to open-up more about their experiences.

Finally, it is important to remind the readership that the participants in this study were selected based on my knowledge of the multiliteracies-oriented approach these LPDs were using in their basic language program as reported in their published scholarship. It is very likely that other LPDs have implemented a multiliteracies-oriented approach in their program but have not presented and published about it. They would have provided perspectives that are not represented here. Future studies should include focus groups with LPDs to get more information about their experiences in implementing curricular changes as well as ethnographic research in their institutions to assess the day-to-day tasks which would provide a fuller picture of the choices made in order to negotiate these changes at the different levels.

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Appendix. Questionnaire questions

1. Do you give consent to participate to this study?
2. Please write you name:
3. Please indicate the university you are currently attending:
4. In which field(s) did you get your PhD in? Please check all that apply - Selected Choice

5. How many years of LPD experience do you have?
6. How many classes do you usually teach in an academic year?
7. Please enter information about the classes you usually teach: - Level - 1. Class name:
8. How many hours per week do you spend conducting LPD tasks?
9. As the LPD, which levels are you in charge of? Please check all that apply: - Selected Choice
10. As the LPD, which levels are you in charge of? Please check all that apply: - Text
11. Your program offers the following degrees: (please check all that apply)
12. The first-year program is taught by: (please check all that apply) - Selected Choice
13. What textbook is currently in use in your first-year program?
14. How long have you been using this textbook for? (all editions combined)
15. What made you choose this textbook?
16. What was the motivation for changing textbooks?
17. Is the textbook coming with its own online platform?
18. How many semesters is the textbook used for?
19. Please explain which section of the textbook do you skip and why?
20. The supplemental texts are usually chosen by: - Selected Choice
21. What is the genre of the additional texts you include in your curriculum?
22. Most of the additional texts you include in your curriculum are:
23. Please explain why you do not supplement the textbook with texts
24. Have you ever considered not using a textbook?
25. Please explain your previous answer:
26. Do you have any recommendations for foreign language textbook publisher?
27. What have you found both rewarding and challenging in adopting a multiliteracies-based approach for your program in terms of textbook or other material use?
28. Are you the faculty in charge of teaching the methodology course?
29. Did you make any kind of modification to the methodology course to facilitate the implementation of your literacy-oriented curriculum?
30. Please explain the modification to the methodology course you had to make to facilitate the implementation of your literacy-oriented curriculum
31. Besides the methodology course, do you offer any kind of professional development activities to Graduate Student Teachers (GST)?
32. Please select the types of professional development activities available to GSTs - Selected Choice
33. What have you found both rewarding and challenging in adopting a multiliteracies-based approach for your program in terms of Graduate Student Teachers' professional development
34. What forms of assessment are used in the first-year program?
35. Please check all that apply: - Selected Choice

36. What have you found both rewarding and challenging in adopting a multiliteracies-based approach for your program in terms of assessment?
37. Do you have any recommendations for foreign language textbook publisher?
38. Would you be willing to participate to a short follow-up phone interview based on your replies to this survey?
39. Please provide your preferred contact information for a phone interview (phone, skype, google hangout)

About the Author

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